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## **COMMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO MCA COUNTRY SELECTION INDICATORS**

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) will take a first step towards ensuring that the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) benefits women and girls through monitoring girls' primary school completion rates and women's skilled birth attendance in eligible countries. Women's lower status is a significant impediment to economic growth worldwide; and for sustainable development, women must be equal beneficiaries of and participants in processes to reduce poverty and achieve growth. One of the most effective ways of moving a society out of poverty is raising women's status by educating girls and providing women primary health care. The MCA therefore must encourage that eligible and funded countries invest in women and girls' health and education to have a meaningful and sustainable impact on poverty reduction and economic growth.

MCC's 2004 country selection criteria did not include any indicator of country policies regarding the majority of the poor, women and girls. As a women's health and rights advocate, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is pleased that in 2005, the MCC will begin to assess gender equity in countries eligible to receive MCA funding. The MCC will now judge a MCA-eligible country's investment in its people according four national indicators, including the girls' primary school completion rate. Additionally, the MCC is considering for 2006 country selection an indicator of births attended by skilled personnel.

By substituting girls' primary school completion rates for primary school completion rates, the MCC demonstrates United States' commitment to gender equity and to the premise that policies supporting gender equity are essential to good development. The United Nations too endorses education of girls as an essential and effective tool for economic growth and development.

MCC should adopt as soon as possible an indicator of women's health in MCA-eligible countries. The Commission on Macroeconomics and Health finds that benefits from health care investment include improved personal and societal health, reduced poverty, and economic growth. In particular, access to key primary health care interventions, such as skilled birth attendants, is necessary for the protection of individual health and family income. If a woman dies or becomes disabled due to childbirth, a family loses a member in her most economically productive years and the wealth of the family is negatively impacted.

The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel is an indicator closely tied to policies impacting maternal mortality and for which data is most widely available. Data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development demonstrate that women's assured access to a skilled birth attendant helps to ensure that women have basic, sanitary obstetric care crucial in reducing the maternal mortality rate in a country. Additionally, having a skilled attendant at birth also helps to decrease maternal morbidity, such as obstetric fistula.

According to the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, the delivery of essential maternal health care is a yardstick for planning of a basic health care system. Skilled attended birth is also an equity measure of a health system's ability and efforts to provide adequate care for women, who, despite their economic and societal contributions, often are not a priority in national decisionmaking.

MCA must continue to focus on women's rights and women's health in all efforts to foster economic growth and reduce poverty. CHANGE calls upon the MCC review the State Department's Country Human Rights Reports for information about women's status and poverty in MCA countries. The MCC should then fund long-term poverty reduction projects, such as women's and girls' health and education initiatives. The MCC should also assure United States taxpayers of the value for women of its programs through programmatic monitoring and evaluation with sex-disaggregated data according to gender-sensitive indicators.